

SUCCESS IN ACTION

When Ariel, the animated star of *The Little Mermaid* sings, "I want to be...part of your world," she could be referring to Irv Zakheim, president and CEO of Zak Designs, Inc. Ariel has been a blockbuster part of his product line of licensed children's dinnerware ever since her debut.

Zakheim has been designing, manufacturing and distributing products locally and internationally for 30 years. But he started with a different dream. Growing up in Los Angeles, he wanted to play professional baseball, and then become a teacher and coach. After college, he did play baseball professionally for the Chicago White Sox before focusing on entrepreneurship.

In 1976, Zakheim began selling trendy puka shell necklaces in Hawaii, working with a Philippine supplier. Because he sensed that the necklace popularity was a passing retail fad, he shifted his efforts to the embroidered goods market. However, when quotas started being placed on imported textiles, he knew he needed to diversify again.

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With a knack for sensing potential, he discovered an untapped market when he saw interesting children's dinnerware made out of melamine. So in 1985, he began looking for suppliers and distributors, and he added a new feature - licensors who would lend their characters to the

products. Perhaps it was insight from growing up in the shadows of Disneyland, but the concept really worked. Soon his plate was full of business growth opportunities.

His big break came in 1988 when Disney, the world leader in animation, gave Zak Designs the rights to Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers. The next year, Disney awarded Zak Designs the rights to the classic comic Dick Tracy, but also asked for a line of products to help publicize a lesser-known animated movie about a sea princess - *The Little Mermaid*.

In an industry marked by the whims of children, Zakheim has proven that he can recognize which cartoon and superhero characters will be fleeting fads or big hits. Zakheim has been a fairly accurate judge, but not all bets have paid off. The Hunchback of Notre dame was a flop and sales of Star Wars I items did not meet expectations.



2006 Washington State Winner SBA Small Business Person of the Year



"Have unique products that fill a void, stay focused and for the long term allow your products to evolve to fit your market's changing needs." - Irv Zakheim

Whimsical yet sturdy little dishes and cups make meals more enticing for even the pickiest child. Today, licensed children's dinnerware is a \$250 million retail market worldwide, and Zak Designs remains the global leader, holding about a 95% market share. Its licensed mealtime products feature characters from Disney, Nickelodeon, Marvel, DreamWorks and nearly every other major licensor and are sold by retailers around the world, including Target, ShopKo, Toys R Us, Wal-Mart, Albertsons, Kroger, and more.

Zak Designs has also diversified its product lines by developing an adult dinnerware division devoted to trend-forward tableware that captures the latest global fashions and is sold in specialty stores such as Crate & Barrel. Zakheim expects this to become the larger division of his company soon.



From Spokane and nine international offices, Zakheim serves as the global authority on trend-focused tableware. This dinnerware designer and manufacturer sets the table and invites others to feast on best practices through industry organizations such as the International Housewares Association, the International Trade Alliance and the Licensing Industry Manufacturers Association.

Zakheim is the primary driving force behind the company's daily operations and its vision. The exceptional commitment to serving children and families around the world is the secret to Irv Zakheim's success.

Zak Designs

30 Years of Fun!

1986 - 1 employee

2006 - 200 employees

worldwide operation

www.zak.com

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